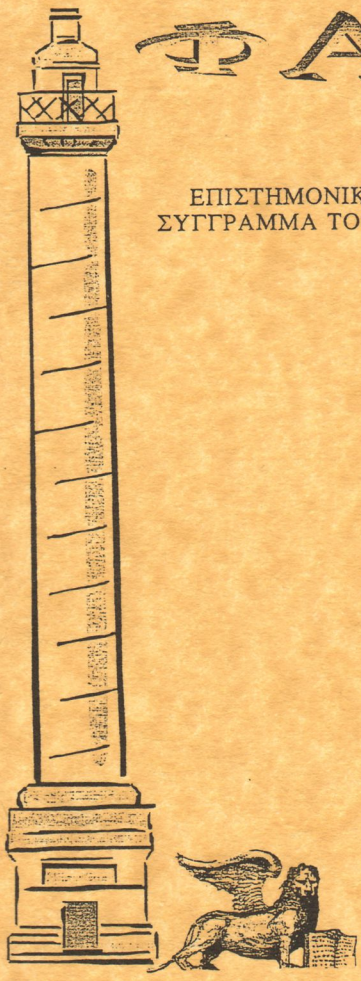
ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣΤΙΚΟΣ ΦΑΡΟΣ



ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΟΝΙΚΟΝ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΚΟΝ ΠΕΡΙΟΔΙΚΟΝ
ΣΥΓΓΡΑΜΜΑ ΤΟΥ ΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΕΙΟΥ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΕΙΑΣ

EKKLESIASTIKOS PHAROS
2005

ΕΚΔΟΣΙΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΦΡΙΚΗΣ
ΝΕΑ ΣΕΙΡΑ16

VOLUME 87
(NEW SERIES 16)

ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΕΙΑ – JOHANNESBURG 2005

ISSN 1018-9556

ISSN 1018-9556=*Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 87 (2005) N. S. 16

NOAH'S ARK IN MISIS-MOPSUESTIA

Füsun Tülek

University of Kocaeli, Izmit, Turkey

Abstract

Decorating the floor mosaic of an edifice in Misis-Mopsuestia is a chest, bearing the inscription 'Ark of Noah' surrounded by two rows of animal processions. The figure of Noah is absent in the image. The paper asks questions such as: How was the Deluge conceived and the image of Ark was interpreted by the early Christians and church fathers? What are the common characteristics of the mosaic images of the Ark of Noah? Can these images be identified together with the illustrated examples of the Ark of Noah in the wall paintings of the Catacombs and sarcophagi in Rome? What is the significance of the Ark of Noah image in the identification of the Misis monument?

Decorating the floor mosaic of an edifice in Misis-Mopsuestia is a chest, bearing the inscription 'Ark of Noah' surrounded by two processions of animals. The figure of Noah is absent in the image.[1] The structure housing the mosaic has a naos flanked by two aisles on the north side and by a single aisle on the south side. It is preceded by a narthex, and described as having a semicircular apse.

The Ark of Noah and the Flood is narrated in the Book of Genesis. Noah is of the tenth generation of men after the Creation, born to Lamech, who

[1] L.Budde, Antike Mosaiken in Kilikien I (1969).

blessed his son as the one who will bring relief from the labour due to the curse of God on earth (GEN 5:28). The text used the root of the word Noah meaning "comfort" or "relieve".[2] Noah was a righteous man and had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth (GEN 6:9). The book of Genesis tells that God was unhappy with the wickedness of the man he had created. Noah, as the just man of his time, was ordered to build an Ark with ribs of the Cypress tree (GEN 6:14).[3] God let him rescue his family and pairs of male and female beasts, using an ark he was instructed to build in the time when the rain poured down to destroy earth under heaven.

Representations of the Ark of Noah, the vessel, which became the pictorial sign of the deluge, was frequently illustrated in early Christian art. Yet, the earliest illustrations of the Ark have been found in Asia Minor in the third century at the time the iconography of Christianity has not yet been established. In the fourth century images of the Ark frequented funerary art, particularly paintings of the catacombs and sarcophagi at Rome.[4] The fifth and sixth century manuscripts of the Cotton and Vienna Genesis contain narrative illuminations of the Ark. The theme was rarely illustrated after the sixth century and survived in manuscripts until it made its incidental triumphal return in the thirteenth century wall mosaics of the church of San Marco in Venice.

The Misis mosaic contains one of the rare illustrations of the Ark of Noah in representing animals at procession, and as a narrative illustration of the theme executed in the fifth century. There are only two of these illustrations ever found in floor mosaics, which both are in geographic proximity; Gerasa and Misis mosaics. In this study, I will explore issues raised by the Misis illustration: What does the mosaic illustration signify and what is its place within the representations of the Ark images? What is the significance of the illustration in the decoration program of the Misis edifice? What are the common characteristics of the two mosaic images of the Ark of Noah? Can these images be identified together with the illustrated examples of the Ark of Noah in the wall paintings of the Catacombs and sarcophagi in Rome?

Biblical events have been found depicted on wall paintings in the synagogue of Dura Europos on the Euphrates, as *cyclic* and *monoscenic*

---

[2] J.P.Lewis, A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood in Jewish and Christian Literature (Leiden, 1968) 3.

[3] For Lewis Noah was ordered to build the Ark of gopher wood. Lewis, 1968, 4.

[4] Barrel-vaulted tombs painted with scenes from Old and New Testament have been found and on display in the Museum of Byzantine Culture at Thessaloniki. The tombs have been dated to the 3rd-5th centuries of which one contains illustration of Noah's Ark identified by inscription. See: E. Kourkoutidou-Nicolaidou "From the Elysian Fields to the Christian paradise" in: The Transformation of the Roman World AD 400-900 (Berkeley, CA, 1997) 128-143.

narrative illustrations, dated to ca 243 CE.[5] Paintings contained narrative illustrations of scenes such as *Jacob's blessing*, from Exodus; *Childhood of Moses, the Ark of the Covenant* and *the return of the Ark*, from the Book of Kings; *Elijah meeting the Priests* and *Elijah's sacrifice*, from the book of Ezekiel *the Ezekiel Cycle*. Over the niche of the Torah messianic scenes have been illustrated including *David/Orpheus*, *Tree of Life* growing out of the Torah, the *Binding of Isaac* and the *Lion of Judah*.

The earliest illustration of the Ark bearing the image of Noah and his family has been found on coins struck in a province of Asia Minor in Phrygia in the city Apamea, which was on the crossroads of trade routes. The city was known called as Apamea kibotos, probably due to the shape of the mountain at whose skirts the city was founded, which also might have been associated with the Great Ararat Mountain where the Ark disembarked.[6] Jewish community struck these coins during the Panegyrian games at the time of the Emperor Septimus Severus. The use of the image prevailed from the turn of the third century into the second half of the third century.

The reverse of the Apamea coin bears a flat-bottomed box-like Ark in which Noah and his wife are figured standing in profile. NΩE is inscribed on the Ark. Two doves perch on the wide-open lid of the box-like structure of which the dove bears an olive branch in her beak. On the left half of the coin, Noah and his wife are figured standing outside of the Ark. The figures raise their right arms in prayer while the left arms are placed bent to the back. The illustrations on the coin narrate the sequences of the Flood in Genesis 8:8-11 where Noah sends out a dove out twice to see whether the water on the earth had subsided. At first the dove comes back finding no place to settle. as the land was still inundated. The second time she comes back with an olive branch in her beak, indicating land is near. Thus the Ark comes to dry land and Noah and his wife disembark and pray to God. On the Apamea coins four sequences of the story have been narrated in illustrations by conflating in time and space. The scene, having been explicitly identified by inscription, indicates that the imagery of the Ark and the Flood was familiar to the traditional art in Asia Minor. For almost three-quarters of a century the tradition of striking the coins continued without any transformations in the iconography, indicating the power of the community and the value assigned to the image. In addition, the illustration on the coins displays knowledge and tradition of depicting a story

---

[5] Rostovtsev, M.I., et.al., eds. The excavations at Dura-Europos (New Haven, 1943); J. Gutmann ed. The Dura-Europos synagogue: a re-evaluation (1932-1972) (Chambersburg, PA, 1973); K. Weitzmann and Herbert L. Kessler The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art (Washington D.C., 1990).

[6] B. Narkiss, "Representational Art" p.383 in: Age of Sprituality. Late Antique and early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century (Princeton, 1979) ed. by K. Weitzmann.

in narrative sequences of images by conflating time and space, almost in cyclic representation. For Grabar, the Apamea coin is a religious object that evoked the celebrated relic of the city.[7]

In Southeast Asia Minor Misis-Mopsuestia in Cilicia produced a second example of the Ark of Noah image. The Ark has been illustrated as a chest raised on four legs containing two doves; one of the doves is already inside and the other one has just entered, with part of her tail still visible. The Greek title ΚΙΒΟΤΟΣ ΝΟΕΡ is inscribed on the brown chest in tessellated white. The chest is depicted on a white background with two rows of animals surrounding it in a procession that takes place on firmly defined ground. The animals of the inner procession are avian, mostly of a domesticated sort, while the outer procession contains mammals or wild beasts. The Ark does not contain figures of Noah and his family. The inscription explicitly defines that that is the chest of Noah, and the delineation of the ground denotes that the Ark is on dry land and the animals have just disembarked in procession. The mosaic has been dated to the middle of the fifth century.[8]

Similar to the Misis mosaic a third image of the Ark has been found in a mosaic in the area of Syria-Palestine. The floor mosaic of the synagogue in Gerasa contains an illustration of the Ark of Noah with his family and two processions of animals coming out of the Ark. Part of the mosaic has been destroyed; yet some important details are still visible. The Ark must have been illustrated at the left corner where there is a lacuna in the floor mosaic. Fortunately, above the destroyed part of the mosaic, a dove with an olive branch in her beak is visible, and by her are inscribed the names of the two sons of Noah: Shem and Japheth. The mosaic has been dated to the fifth century.[9] Evidently, in this period of time the artist was liberated from religious restrictions concerning the depiction of graven images.

A common feature of these three representations of the Ark of Noah is that they illustrate the sequence after the water subsided from the Deluge hence the Ark is on dry land. For Budde, in the Misis mosaic, the white background

---

[7] A. Grabar, Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins (Princeton, NJ, 1968) 25.

[8] Budde initially dated the mosaic to c.400 CE in his preliminary excavation report: "Die Ausgrabungen in Misis-Mopsuehestia" Deutsch-Turkische Gesellschaft Bonn, 17 (1957) 2-4; and in the article "Die frühchristlichen Mosaiken von Misis-Mopsuehestia in Kilikien, Pantheon 18 (1960) 116. However, in his final publication of the mosaic (1969, 34). Budde assigns the mosaics to the third quarter of the fourth century. Stylistically and in coherence with the evolution of the mosaic designs in the Eastern Mediterranean the mosaic of Misis has been dated to the middle of the 5th century by E. Kitzinger in "Mosaics in the Greek East From Constantine to Justinian" GMCR I (Paris, 1965) 345.

[9] F. M. Biebel, "Mosaics" on page 318 in: C.H. Kraeling, Gerasa: The city of Decapolis (New Haven, Conn., 1938); Kraeling, on page 473 assigned the mosaic inscriptions to the fifth century.

on which the Ark is depicted alludes to water of the Flood.[10] Therefore, he does not read the animals being outside of the Ark and are in procession. However, they are clearly represented in procession on a ground line thickly delineated, which alludes to dry land, thus indicating the scene after disembarkation. The existence of two doves in the Ark of the Misis mosaic refers to the two phases of the Flood Noah sent them out to search for dry land: while there is still water and when the dry land is found, similar to the imagery on the Apamea coin. Therefore, the Misis mosaic is a narrative illustration similar to the Apamea image and as a sequential representation similar to the depiction in Gerasa mosaic. In two of these representations, both on the Apamea coins and in the Gerasa synagogue mosaic, Noah and his family are included in the scene, whereas in Misis mosaic Noah is absent. As for the shape of the Ark, we have no knowledge of it in Gerasa mosaic since it is lost. The other two images, both in the Apamea coin and the Misis mosaic, the form of the Ark has been illustrated as a chest like object either flat-bottomed or four legged. The other two images, the coin and Gerasa mosaic, originate from Jewish religious tradition and community, whereas the identity of the Misis edifice is still controversial.

In Egypt, two chapels at the necropolis of El-Bagawat contain images of Ark representing Noah with his family, dated to the fourth century. In Algeria a fourth century bas-relief found in Djemila contains the image of Ark, as well. In Thessaloniki tomb paintings dated from third to fifth centuries have been found, including one image of the Noah's Ark.[11] The Deluge and the Ark have been illuminated in the manuscripts of the Cotton Genesis and Vienna Genesis dated to the fifth and sixth centuries. A sixth century floor mosaic in Cyrenaica, in the east church of Apollonia, contained illustration of Noah's Ark. In the south transept floor mosaic of the church the Ark image has been utilized as one of the filler ornaments of the orthogonal design of the mosaic. It figured Noah sending the dove, his hands raised up in *Orans.* The blue streaks neatly delineated beneath the Ark image confirmed that it is the Deluge scene. For its archaeologist the Ark is an image chosen haphazardly from a model book without any deliberation of the decoration program alluding to any symbolic significance.[12] However, the wall paintings in El-Bagawat, Thessaloniki and the bas-relief in Djemila are definitely from a Christian context bearing symbolic connotations.

In Rome from the beginning of the fourth century illustrations of the Ark of Noah have been observed, mainly on wall paintings in the Catacombs

[10] L. Budde, AMK I, 40 and 41.
[11] Kourkoutidou-Nicolaidou, 1997, 130.
[12] E. Alföldi-Rosenbaum and J.B. Ward-Perkins, Justinianic Mosaic Pavements in Cyrenaican Churches (1980, Rome) 61, fig.1, pl.37.1.

and on sarcophagi reliefs. Biblical images have been found illustrated in these representations highlighting single scenes such as *Daniel in the Lion's Den, Three Hebrews in the Furnace* and the story of Jonah. The majority of the Biblical images are of the Ark of Noah, illustrated in almost every catacomb in Rome, numbering 42 images in all, of which the best preserved are in SS, the Peter and Marcellianus catacomb dating from the fourth century.[13] In all of these images the Flood and the Ark have been reduced to single figure of Noah, a box-like Ark and a dove. Noah has been figured with hands outstretched in profile or mostly frontal in *Orans,* sending a dove or expecting it. The scene definitely figures Noah during the Deluge. The representations on sarcophagi reliefs are similar to the catacomb paintings, with inclusions of streaks of water delineated expressively beneath the Ark. The images of the Ark of Noah from El-Bagawat and Thessaloniki share common features with the Roman examples as of being in funerary context, and are conspicuously products of Christian art.

In the first half of the fifth century, Biblical events have been illuminated extensively on wall mosaics of the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, in Rome. It is noteworthy that the cyclic representations of the church do not include representation of the Deluge. It is evident that early Christian art preferred to confine the imagery of the Ark of Noah to sepulchral art where the image became a pictorial sign that represents the divine intervention for salvation of believers.

How was the Deluge conceived and the image of Ark was interpreted by the early Christians and church fathers? Though reduced to its minimal components the image achieved to symbolize the conception of the Ark in the fourth century. While some of the early church fathers, such as Tertullian, considered the Ark as a means of providing salvation by water, the general tendency was to consider it as the symbol of the Church. St. John Chrysostom elucidated that the

> "*ark is the church, Noah is the Christ, the dove is the Holy Spirit and the olive is the blessing of God*".[14]

Scholars interpreted the illustrations of the Ark of Noah in Christian Art, of which early examples are found in catacomb paintings and Roman sarcophagi. Fink conceiving Noah as "the righteous" asserted that in the funerary context Noah was considered as a symbol of repentance and the artist represented

---

[13] H. Leclercq "Arche" in Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie tome 2 (Paris, 1907) 2709-2732; F. Schmidtke "Arche" in Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum Band I ed. Th. Klauser (1941) 597-602; H. Hohl, "Arche Noe" in Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie vol. I ed. E. Kirschbaum (1968) 17-180.

[14] St. John Chyrsostom Homilies in P.G. XLVIII col. 1037.

Noah as the type of "just" man whose justification is achieved by repentance.[15] For Hooyman there is an emphasis of baptism in Noah representations and he asserted that the salvation of Noah from the Flood reflected the salvation of the Christian through baptism.[16] Peterson considered the Ark as a ship allegory of the church; Rahner took the Ark as the church symbolizing salvation.[17] Budde interprets the Ark mosaic in Misis similarly to Peterson and Rahner.[18] For Murray, the scholarship has not yet fully examined the eschatological significance of the image. For her, the emergence of the Noah figure as a special interest in decorative compositions of Christian funerary art should elicit more inquiry.

The imagery finds many scholarly interpretations. While for Fink the primary element of the iconography is the *Noah in Orans*, for Hooyman the dove conveys the symbol of baptism. For Murray, the funerary significance of the iconography lies in the shape of the Ark[19]. For the Christian believer, Murray adds, the figure of Noah was no longer a part of biblical narrative. The believer associated himself with Noah who underwent the ordeal of death, but through baptism finds his death a prelude to life. Thus the Ark/box is the symbol of death and salvation.

In Christian iconography, the Ark is either a ship or a tomb that brought survival through water, and therefore is associated with baptism. In early Christian art the image of Ark became a pictorial sign symbolizing the salvation of Christian believer, which conveyed the relation between baptism, death and afterlife. Thus the funerary significance of the image was fulfilled. It becomes explicit why in early Christianity the image was almost always found in funerary context and conveyed in funerary iconography.

However, neither the floor mosaics in Misis and Gerasa nor the coins of Apamea are of funerary context. Grabar identified the commemorative nature of the Apamea coins as bearing image of a religious relic that conveyed salvation of the community, the Jews, who issued it.[20] As for the Gerasa mosaic, it is in a Jewish religious architectural context. Unlike the Catacomb

---

[15] J. Fink Noe der Gerechte in der Frühchristlichen Kunst (Münster/Köln, 1955) 60.

[16] R. P. J. Hooyman, "Die Noe Darstellung in der Frühchristlichen Kunst" Vigilae Christianae 21 (1958) 113-135.

[17] E. Peterson, "Das Schiff als Symbol der Kirche: Die Tat des Messias in eschatalogischen Meersturm in der judischen und altchristlichen Überlieferung" Theologische Zeitschrift 6 (1950) 77-79.

[18] L. Budde, "Die Rettende Arche Noes" 32 Riv.Ac(1956) 41-58; H. Rahner, Symbole der Kirche (Salzburg, 1964).

[19] Sister C. Murray, Rebirth and Afterlife: A study of the Transmutation of some Pagan imagery in early Christian Funerary Art B.A.R. v.100 (1981) 100ff.

[20] A. Grabar, Christian Iconography (Princeton, N.J., 1968) 25.

images, which are pictorial signs of a Christian statement, the images of the Apamea coins and the two mosaics are narrative representations.

The Misis Ark as a Judaic Representation

The Misis Ark floor mosaic is not from a funerary context. It prominently adorns main hall, naos of a sumptuously decorated floor of a structure. If we return to Budde, who unearthed the floor mosaic, we find that he evaluated the image within Christian context. He noted that the inscription "Noah's ark" signifies the meaning of the entire decorative program of the nave mosaic and that the image represents the Deluge since the white background in which the chest is placed alludes to water.[21] He ignored conspicuously rendered ground line on which the animals proceed.

For Buschhausen, the Ark of Noah image in the Misis mosaic is a symbolic analogy of the church. It is a solitary allusion to the Noah story, but an absolute allegoric interpretation of the image of the Deluge by Philo of Alexandria.[22]

To find a Jewish interpretation of the Ark representation, we turn to Lewis who examined the Rabbinic texts for the meaning of Noah in ancient Judaica. The Judaic texts reflect that Noah was a righteous man, as his name foretold that he would have a part in the world to come and he would bring comfort for his people.[23] Rabbinic texts were concerned in the details of the Deluge: for instance of the animals which Noah sent out from the Ark, the text of the *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* recounts that raven never returns because he was feeding on the corpse and was content.[24] Rabbi Judah b. Nahman points out that dove would not have returned if she found a place to rest, thus dove symbolizes Israel who would find no resting place in exile.[25]

Rabbis commented on the source of the olive branch, as well. For Rabbi Abba Kahana, the dove picks the olive branch from the land of Israel. Profusion of the Rabbinic texts that contain minute interpretations of the incidents of the Flood display the significance of the theme in the Jewish realm. Noah was the prototype for the new generation to be created. For Lewis the haggadic way of interpretation was a departure from the allegory of Philo and distant from the typology of later Church fathers.[26]

---

[21] Budde AMK I, 40, 41.

[22] H. Buschhausen, "Das Archemosaik in der Kirche von Mopsuestia" 21 JÖB (1972) 71. Philo wrote commentaries on Scripture in Greek. His passages on Flood has been examined by Lewis "The Flood in Hellenistic-Jewish writers" in op.cit., pp. 42-74;

[23] Lewis, "The Rabbinic Noah", 1968

[24] Lewis, 1968, 146; It is noteworthy to draw attention to J. Gutmann's article on raven, "Noah's raven in early Christian and Byzantine Art" Cah.A 26 (1977) 57-71.

[25] B. Lorentz The Taube in altertum (Wurzen, 1886).

[26] Lewis, 1968, 155.

The righteous man, Noah the blameless, who saved the creatures of God to a new sinless world, is absent in the illustration of the theme in the Misis floor mosaic. Why would the designer of the edifice exclude the figure of the protagonist of the theme? How would the absence of the main religious figure affect the meaning conveyed in the image and reflect on the identification of the nature of the iconography? The excavation of the edifice did not yield any *signia-* any inscription dedicatory or commemorative, any liturgical relief, or illustration, any small find that would have indicated the function and the identity of the architectural context, except a lavishly decorated floor, one of the most exquisite and elaborate floors in the Cilicia mosaic corpus. Though the apse has been described as round in form, there is no drawing or picture of the apse.[27] The single metal cross find found in the debris over the mosaic is insufficient to deduce the identity of the structure as a church.

The lopsided plan type of the structure is unusual among the Cilicia churches, as it has two aisles at the north and one aisle at the south. Synagogue architecture of the diaspora is not much help in defining the architectural plan. It is a common practice for the diaspora synagogues to employ the standard architectural style of the cultures Jews live in. In Galilee the synagogue Hammat-Tiberias is a roughly square building with two aisles on the left and one aisle on the right, which is identical to the Misis edifice.[28] The architectural plan types in the corpus of Cilicia churches do not contain any lopsided church plans. It has been pointed out that it is possible that the structure had one more aisle at the south, thus it might have been a five-aisled basilica.[29] However, there is no solid evidence for such an assumption. If there had been an outer south aisle it would have been excavated together with the rest of the structure. Neither preliminary reports of the excavation nor the final monograph record any obstruction or restriction that would prevent concluding to unearth the entire structure.

In the Cilicia mosaic corpus, among the existing unearthed floors, there are no figural representations, or representation of any liturgical object predominating the decoration of the mosaic. The rest of the mosaic decoration in Misis is embellished with exquisite acanthus scroll containing fruits, animals and objects such as oil lamps, candle bars, and fruit baskets. These objects convey allusion to abundance and wealth, but do not bear any distinct connotation to the identity of the edifice. A *shofar*-like object is, indeed, a

---

[27] Budde, AMK I , p.22. The sole plan of the monument has been published by Th. Bossert at the outset of the excavations. If the apse existed, it might have been an inscribed apse as implies Budde in his statement:" Die Außenseite der Apsis ließ sich nicht klären".

[28] M. Dothan, Qadmoniot 1 (1968) 120.

[29] H. G. Tümmel "Das Samson-Mosaik in Misis (Mopsuhestia) und seine Inschriften" ZPDV 90 (1974) 69.

figure of cornucopia reinforcing the allusion to abundance. However, the floor mosaic of the edifice, at its outer north aisle, contains a narrative cyclic illustration of another Biblical event, the *Samson Cycle*. Cyclic, figural, and narrative representations have not been observed on the church floors in the western provinces of Anatolia nor in Cilicia, Antioch, or in Syria-Palestine.[30] Narrations of Biblical events in cyclic representations, as elucidated by Weitzmann[31], in epitomized or decorative method have not been observed on the church floors at all in early Christianity, except on the walls of Santa Maria Maggiore and successively in the churches of Ravenna.

However, fifth -sixth century floors of the synagogues in Palestine contain mosaic illustrations narrating the Biblical events. The tradition of cyclic illustrations in epitomized or decorative ways has been found in early Jewish tradition in Dura Europos. To find narrative and cyclic images would not be unusual if the mosaics in the Misis edifice were connected with a synagogue rather than a church. It is beyond the scope of the present study to examine the cyclic illustration of Samson's Life.[32] On the other hand, it should be noted that considering Samson was a hero of Jewish culture, the coexistence of his life cycle representation reinforces the Jewish identity of the edifice. In addition Avi-Yonah suggests that the Jewish community of the Misis-Mopsuestia might have associated Samson with the legendary founder of the town hero Mopsos.[33] In addition, the inscriptions on the cyclic illustrations are of the Septuagint text of the Bible that used in Judaica at that time, and Hebrew reads from right to left which the execution of the inscription would be fit for a synagogue.[34]

The Proscription of Images in Jewish Culture

Proscription of images in Judaic representations of religious themes was explicitly written in the Book of Exodus (Exod.20:4), forbidding the depiction of "a graven image or any likeness" and "bowing down [to a graven image]".

This proscription is explained as a method to preserve the Jewish

---

[30] Except the single Biblical image "Adam enthroned" in the main nave floor mosaic of the north church in Huarte. Donceel-Voûte, 1988, 112-113, 480, and fig.71.

[31] K. Weitzmann, Illustrations in Roll and Codex: A Study of the Origin and Method of Text Illustration (Princeton, NJ, 1947) p. 23.

[32] E. Kitzinger, "The Samson Floor at Mopsuestia" DOP 27 (1973) 135-144.

[33] M. Avi-Yonah, " The Mosaics of Mopsuestia- Church or Synagogue" in: Ancient Synagogues Revealed (Jerusalem, 1982) p.190; H. Çambel, Corpus of Hierogylphic Luwian Inscriptions, Karatepe-Aslantaş.The Inscriptions: Facsimile Edition (Gruyter, 1999) 51, 53: "I am Azatiwada king of Danunians I extended the land of plain of Adana,..of house of Mopsos. ..many serve Azatiwada, and the house of Mopsos.." from Phu/A I and Phu/AIII.

[34] I am grateful to my mentor professor Henry Maguire for withdrawing my attention to the matter.

identity separate from Pagan environment, so the proscription of images was interpreted strictly throughout Jewish history.[35] It seems otherwise: some images were taken as decorative and were part of architectural interiors in Jewish life. The hostile expressions of Josephus Flavius towards the images in the first century BCE indicate that indeed, the images were in use at his time period, thus he voiced his detest. Josephus justified his razing down the palace of Herod because it was decorated with figures of animals. The Jewish interaction with Hellenism seems to have created upscale ruling class families, such as the Hasmonean and Tobiads, thus creating the desire to decorate homes and structures with figural images as did their pagan neighbors. Schubert states that an approving Jewish approach to images was witnessed in environs where images were appreciated particularly in the Pagan culture of Late Antiquity.

For Schubert these Hellenized reflections of Jewish culture led scholars to assume that the Septuagint played a role in a proliferation of images, specifically originating in Alexandria. Grounding the emergence of Jewish figurative art on such an assumption is not valid, since the riot of 115-117 CE in Alexandria against Rome interrupted the power of the Alexandrian Judaism, whereas the earliest Jewish figurative painting does not date before the third century, in Dura Europos, 243 CE. Thus, the source of the influence should be searched in the Rabbinic texts reflected in Talmud and Midrashim.[36] Among numerous Rabbinic texts Schubert excerpted two of them as sufficient evidence to explain the pro-image attitude of the Jewish culture at the time. The Jerusalem Talmud recounts: "In the days of Rav Yohanna-who died in 279 CE- they began to paint on the walls, and he did not hinder them", and the Talmud in Leningrad National Library remarks further: "In the days of Rav Abun-lived in c.300CE- they began to produce mosaics with figures, and he hindered them not."

The dearth of figural mosaics uncovered in ancient synagogues is in concordance with the Rabbinic texts. While the literary Jewish sources yield an admission of images in certain occasions and circumferences, contrary to what scholarship believed until now, the visual evidence unearthed in archaeological excavations of the synagogues support the texts excerpted above. Two Jewish art historians, R. Hachlili and the late M. Avi-Yonah are the fervent proponents of the Jewish origin of the Misis-Mopsuestia structure and its floor mosaic, and they believe that it is a representation of Jewish iconography and that the structure is a synagogue.

---

[35] K. Schubert, "Jewish Art in the Light of Jewish Tradition" in: H. Schreckenberg and K. Schubert Jewish Historiography and Iconography in early Medieval Christianity (Assen, 1991) 148.

[36] Schubert, 1991, 150ff.

For Hachlili, Biblical depictions are much more common on synagogue floors than on church floors and the irregular aisles of the building are similar to some synagogue structures in the Land of Israel, particularly at Hammat Tiberias and Gaza, as observed by Kitzinger.[37] For Avi-Yonah, besides the several reasons explained above the Greek captions in the Samson cycle mosaic are derived from the Septuagint translation which Jews also used at least until the sixth century, and Samson, the hero of the tribe of Dan, must have been considered to resemble Mopsus, the founder of Mopsuestia.[38] The choice of the Samson cycle as the theme for their pavement therefore was not coincidental but was considered appropriate by the local Jewish community in light of this resemblance.

There is no solid evidence, such as a *menorah*, a *shofar,* an *ethrog* or a *lulab* illustration to identify the structure one way or the other. One should keep in mind that if it is a synagogue, then it is a diaspora monument. A brief survey of diaspora synagogues in Asia Minor demonstrates that all the diaspora Jewish temples are in various plan types. They are not uniform but concealed within the civic structures of the Late Antique society employing common plan types.[39] The most sumptuous synagogue of Asia Minor in Sardes has been lavishly decorated with floor mosaics containing aniconic ornaments. The floor mosaic does not contain any symbol of liturgical utensils, except a menorah carved on a marble slab. The synagogue in Priene was secluded among houses similar to the Dura Europos synagogue, having utilized a former house containing three bas-reliefs with symbols of the menorah, ethrog and lulab. Certain references, to an extent, help to identify a church floor mosaic, such as representation of crosses or canonical type of floor decoration reflecting the architectural plan type, and context of mosaic inscriptions.

It cannot be asserted, for sure, that the Misis mosaic shows beyond a doubt that the Edifice in Misis was a synagogue, but a strong case is plausible for such an assertion. The evidence given in this study strongly supports that it may well have been a diaspora synagogue. Due to lack of supporting imagery or artifacts, the case cannot be made solidly whether in origin it was of Jewish but not Christian. The use of Noah's Ark as an allegory of belief is used both in Judaic and Christian decorative art, although the meaning of the symbol has a vastly different interpretation between the two faiths, which is reflected in the depiction of the story and the decorative context in which it appears. When

---

[37] R. Hachlili, Ancient Jewish Art And Archaeology in the Diaspora (Leiden, 1998) 287-300.

[38] M. Avi-Yonah, 1982, 190.

[39] G. Foerster, "A Survey of Ancient Diaspora Synagogues" in: Ancient Synagogues Revealed ed. by Lee I Levine (Jerusalem, 1982) 164-171.: A. T. Kraabel " Unity and Diversity among Diaspora Synagogues" in: The Synagogue in Late Antiquity ed. by Lee I Levine (Philadelphia, PA, 1987) 49-61.

used in funerary context the Christian connotations of rebirth and salvation through baptism in water are emphasized; when used in a Judaic context as a decorative element, the coming of Israel and the salvation of God's chosen people on earth are the dominant themes. In Misis floor mosaic Jewish symbols lack, as well as, Christian symbols. The lack of Noah's aniconic representation on the Misis mosaic, the emphasis on the doves with the olive branch and the use of the animal procession on dry land in the scene all point strongly to an interpretation of a Judaic context. Coupled with the evidence of the Samson life cycle and the shape of the building, one can confidently say that classifying the edifice as a Jewish structure is not incorrect.